



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation

Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot

AGENCY: Commodity Credit Corporation and Farm Service Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Farm Service Agency (FSA), on behalf of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), is announcing the availability of competitive grants to conduct a forest inventory analysis, forest management, and economic outcomes modelling, for certain currently enrolled Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land. The analysis is focused on lands enrolled in CRP for at least 8 years and located in areas with a substantial concentration of acres enrolled under the following conservation practices devoted to multiple bottomland hardwood tree species: general tree planting, hardwood tree planting, vegetative cover on previously established tree stands, riparian buffers, bottomland timber establishments, and farmable and aquaculture wetlands. Qualified applicants must be non-profit organizations dedicated to conservation, forestry, and wildlife habitats that have experience in conducting accurate forest inventory analysis through the use of advanced, cost-effective technology, as determined by FSA.

DATES: *Application Deadline:* August 15, 2018.

ADDRESSES: Applications must be submitted in the following method: *Grants Portal:* Go to www.grants.gov. Follow the online instructions for submitting grants.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Richard Iovanna, telephone (202) 720-5291.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Section 743 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (Pub. L. 115-141) requires that the USDA enter into grant agreements for forest inventory analysis, and forest management, and economic outcomes modelling of certain CRP land. Under this authority, the CCC will make available not more than \$1 million in grants to non-profit organizations. The CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot will be administered under the general supervision of FSA on behalf of CCC, in accordance with the provisions of 2 CFR part 200.

Description

The CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot is focused on lands enrolled in CRP for at least 8 years and located in areas with a substantial concentration of acres enrolled under certain conservation practices devoted to multiple bottomland hardwood tree species, including conservation practices for general tree planting, hardwood tree planting, vegetative cover on previously established tree stands, riparian buffers, bottomland timber establishments, and farmable and aquaculture wetlands. Qualified applicants must be non-profit organizations dedicated to conservation, forestry, and wildlife habitats that have experience in conducting accurate forest inventory analysis through the use of advanced, cost-effective technology.

Comprehensive data analysis using advanced, cost-effective technology on land enrolled in CRP with certain bottomland hardwood practices is important for several reasons. Such data will provide the FSA CRP program manager with the information needed to more effectively manage enrollment. For example, the inventory may find that mortality of a selected species of tree is high in certain situations. As a result, the CRP program manager may adjust what tree species can be enrolled in CRP on a regional and site-specific basis. Economic modeling will

provide information on the expected net returns to CRP enrollees, as well as an evaluation of taxpayer costs. In short, there is a need for data collection and analysis of bottomland hardwood conservation practices and economics.

For more than 30 years under CRP, landowners have voluntarily enrolled tens of millions of farmland acres to conserve and improve soil, protect water quality, and provide wildlife habitat by establishing long-term cover, primarily grasses and trees. Landowners voluntarily enroll their lands for periods of between 10 and 15 years.

CRP cost share funding is provided to landowners who install the prescribed conservation practices. These practices can be costly and require ample investment by the landowner and technical assistance provider to ensure that the practices are appropriate and properly installed. The adequacy of the conservation plan is paramount to achieving CRP enrollment goals, especially for bottomland hardwoods.

Bottomland hardwoods are streamside forest trees – such as cottonwood, sycamore, oak, maple, ash, cypress, and tupelo – that typically grow on lands prone to flooding. Over the past 8 years, 46 States have enrolled land into CRP that is devoted to bottomland hardwood trees. Cumulative CRP bottomland hardwood tree enrollment, over the past 8 years, is just over 799,000 acres, with over 550,000 acres (69 percent) located in the States shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Tree Enrollment in CRP by State over the Past 8 years; USDA May 31, 2018.

State	Total CRP Tree Acres	Cumulative Acres	Acres of Total Percent	Region
Mississippi	204,870	204,870	26	Southern Forest
Arkansas.....	79,341	284,211	36	Southern Forest
Louisiana.....	75,087	359,298	45	Southern Forest
Alabama	58,035	417,333	52	Southeast Forest
Illinois	47,824	465,156	58	Midwest Forest
Georgia.....	35,212	500,369	63	Southeast Forest
North Carolina	26,942	527,310	66	Southeast Forest

State	Total CRP Tree Acres	Cumulative Acres	Acres of Total Percent	Region
Minnesota.....	24,346	551,674	69	Northern Forest

The CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot is intended to provide information and analysis needed to better inform CRP decision making associated with the following bottomland hardwood conservation and stand maintenance practices:

1. CP03 – Tree Planting;
2. CP03A – Hardwood Tree Planting;
3. CP11 – Vegetative Cover - Trees Already Established¹;
4. CP22 – Riparian Buffer;
5. CP31 -- Bottomland Timber Establishment; and
6. CP40 -- Farmable Wetland Program - Aquaculture Wetland.

The inventory, analysis, and modeling must estimate, at a minimum, stand composition, stand density, basal area, and tree height using remotely sensed data (rather than data collected by visiting a site). The data will be used to generate statistically robust estimates of commercial value, economic returns, carbon sequestration, and wildlife and water quality impacts for each of the practices in at least one of the regions and states enumerated in Table 1. These estimates will identify species appropriate for bottomland CRP practices or sites, as well as forest management practices needed to maintain cover during the contract period. An accurate assessment of the model output will be conducted using ground plots.

¹ The purpose of the CP11 practice is to maintain a stand of trees in a timber planting previously established on cropland as practice CP-3 or CP-3A to enhance environmental benefits. This CP11 practice was available only through a re-offer of expiring or expired CRP acres.

Definitions

The 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act uses the term “non-profit organizations.” Consistent with OMB Circular A-122, the term “non-profit organization” means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization that:

1. Is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest;
2. Is not organized primarily for profit; and
3. Uses its net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand its operations.

The term "non-profit organization" excludes:

1. Colleges and universities, unless a 501(c)(3) has been established;
2. Hospitals;
3. State, local, and federally-recognized Indian tribal governments; and
4. Those non-profit organizations that are excluded from coverage under paragraph 5 of Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-122.

The term “economic outcomes modelling” as used in this NOFA, must include multiple dimensions, including, but not limited to, baseline return estimates to CRP participants (taking into account, among other items, commercial value), and returns under alternative scenarios that reflect management recommendations.

Eligibility and Application Process

Non-profit organizations dedicated to conservation, forestry, and wildlife habitats, that have experience in conducting forest inventory analysis through the use of remote sensing data and technology are eligible to apply. Applicants must submit an application by August 15, 2018, through www.grants.gov. To find the CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot in www.grants.gov,

search on funding opportunity number USDA-FSA-CRPFIA-2018. Applications must include, but are not limited to, an executive summary, work plan, and budget information using Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) form. (See www.grants.gov for more details about the specific application requirements.)

Non-profit organizations may submit a combined cross-organization proposal to include work that will be coordinated across more than one organization, especially if a joint proposal creates synergies or increased efficiencies. The application may include one or more forest regions.

The result of a successful application will be a one-time grant agreement. Successful applicants will be required to sign the grant agreement with FSA, which will include reporting and recordkeeping requirements. It is possible that not all of the \$1 million authorized by Congress for this pilot will be expended. All applications are subject to the approval of FSA, and FSA reserves the right to reject any and all applications.

Application Selection Criteria

FSA will evaluate applications using the evaluation criteria specified in this NOFA and on www.grants.gov to select the application(s) that best support the goals of CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot. A proposal must include the following information; this information will be used by FSA in the awarding of grants:

1. Amount of funding requested;
2. Amount of funding from other parties (with sufficient documentation) that provide additional leverage, if any; for example, specifying the regions, states, practices and plots where the proposal goes beyond minimal requirements (such as by considering CP-36, long-leaf pine);

3. Sampling approach to be used;
4. Remotely sensed data to be used, including its sources and its spatial, temporal, and spectral resolution;
5. Number and relevance of metrics to be estimated and the modeling approach to be used to estimate the metrics;
6. The accuracy assessment, including sampling approach and location of ground plots following the U.S. Forest Service's Common Stand Examination protocols or those in the peer-reviewed literature; and
7. Work plan and timeline for completion by September 30, 2020.

Process for Evaluation and Application and Awards of Grants

After applicants submit applications, FSA, on behalf of CCC, will screen each application to determine whether the applicant is eligible and whether the application is complete and sufficiently responsive to the requirements specified in this NOFA. Applicants may revise their applications and re-submit them prior to the published deadline if there is sufficient time to do so. FSA will appoint an inter-agency review panel to evaluate the applications. During the evaluation period, FSA may contact an applicant to seek clarification and modification of the proposal. The resulting CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot grant agreements will be between the non-profit organization(s) and FSA.

Any non-profit organization that receives a grant must commit to fully expend the awarded federal funds by September 30, 2020, with an opportunity for extension upon approval by FSA.

Responsibilities of the Participants

Successful applicants will be required to sign an agreement with FSA and provide detailed budget and schedule information. The agreement will require periodic achievement reports. The agreement will require the grantee to commit to do all of the following:

1. Perform inventory, analysis, modelling and validating, including conducting site visits and plot sampling, on the CRP enrolled acreage; and
2. Provide an accounting for the money received by the grantee.

During the term of the grant, the grantee will be required to obtain prior approval for any changes to the scope, objectives, or funding allocation of the approved agreement. Failure to obtain prior approval of such changes may be considered a violation, and in such case the grantee may be required to return all grant funds, including any funds already expended, as determined appropriate by FSA. Grantees will be required to monitor funds and report on expenditures. The grantee must certify that the CCC funds will not be used to:

1. Duplicate existing inventories, analysis, or economic modelling efforts; however, grant funds may be used to expand the prior inventories, analysis, or economic modelling efforts;
2. Pay costs of preparing a CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot grant application;
3. Pay costs of the project incurred prior to the date of grant approval;
4. Fund political activities or lobbying efforts;
5. Pay any judgment or debt owed to the United States;
6. Pay for the repair of privately owned vehicles;
7. Pay for unrelated salaries, overhead, and expenses; or
8. Pay for unrelated research.

Failure of the grantee to execute a grant agreement in a timely fashion, as determined by FSA, will be construed to be a withdrawal from the CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot. In this event, FSA will demand a refund of the grant funds as deemed appropriate by FSA.

Distribution of Grant Funds and Reimbursement of Unused Funds

FSA expects to transfer CCC funds to the selected non-profit organization applicants before September 30, 2018.

Environmental Review

The environmental impacts of this NOFA have been considered in a manner consistent with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347), the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR parts 1500 through 1508), and the FSA regulations for compliance with NEPA (7 CFR part 799).

The purpose of the grants for the CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot is to provide the CRP Program Manager with information to inform decision-making about the effectiveness of certain conservation practices on CRP land for bottomland hardwoods and are passive in nature and will not involve ground disturbance or tree removals or disturbance. The discretionary aspects of the CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot include, but are not limited to, eligibility, how many grants to award, and how to evaluate submissions. As such, the Categorical Exclusions in 7 CFR 799.31 apply, specifically 7 CFR 799.31(b)(6)(vii) and (viii) (these two categorical exclusions include site characterization, environmental testing, and monitoring where no significant alteration of existing ambient conditions would occur; and, stand analysis for forest management planning, respectively). No “Extraordinary circumstances” (7 CFR 799.33) exist; as such, FSA has determined that this NOFA does not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or

cumulatively. Therefore, beyond this Environmental Review in this NOFA, FSA will not prepare any additional environmental documentation for this action.

Paperwork Reduction Act Requirements

The CRP Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot is exempt from the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), as amended, as specified in subsection 1601(c)(2)(B) of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the 2014 Farm Bill, 16 U.S.C. 3846(b)), which provides that CRP, as a Title II program, be promulgated and administered without regard to the Paperwork Reduction Act.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

The title and number of the Federal assistance in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance to which this NOFA applies is 10.122, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Forest Inventory Analysis Pilot.

Richard Fordyce,
Administrator,
Farm Service Agency.

[FR Doc. 2018-15349 Filed: 7/18/2018 8:45 am; Publication Date: 7/19/2018]